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# Correspondent Sam Jaffe and the web of uncertainty that entangled him

Washington

**T**hey left Sam Jaffe's ashes this week among the heroes at Arlington National Cemetery. I am not sure whether it was final vindication, or ultimate irony.

Sam was an ABC News correspondent in many places, including Moscow in the early Sixties. Somehow he got entangled in a web of gossip and innuendo that linked him at one time with the FBI, and then with the KGB. He spent the last years of his life trying to free himself from that web.

In 1983, as his cancer spread, he won a federal court ruling that cleared him of allegations that he had spied for the Soviet Union. Before that, the CIA had written him a letter admitting that the agency's own investigation proved he was a loyal American. Thus he died with his public record clear. But an infinity of questions has never been answered — about him and his accusers, whoever they were.

In a shoebox of yellowing snapshots from the early Sixties, I have some taken on the Black Sea beach at Mamaia, Rumania, when a flock of us Moscow correspondents were following Nikita Khrushchev on one of his trips to what were then called satellite countries.

There is Sam, sprawled on a hotel towel, mustached, red-faced, his body white against the sand — chain-smoking and laughing, as he often did. Later on that trip,

as at every diplomatic reception in Moscow, Sam would push through the knot of correspondents who edged toward Mr. Khrushchev. "Nikita Sergeyevich!" he would shout, as if he and the Soviet premier were bosom pals.

The assumption among us then was that Sam's ambition was to get an exclusive interview with Mr. Khrushchev, and that caused him to act that way. Some called it gauche. But when Mr. Khrushchev finally was ousted, Sam was among the first to break the story.

He and I were not close: The little band of Western reporters in Moscow worked in two competing combines, and I was in the other one. Competitive resentment of Sam's occasional success and his unctuous manner toward Soviet officials may have inspired some of the talk that went around even then about his being suspiciously close to the Russians.

I saw him later, in Hong Kong, Vietnam and Washington. But I did not realize that something more serious lay behind that gossip until I read that Sam himself had gone public in his fight against it.

Sam maintained that his career was shattered by allegations that he was an undercover intelligence agent.

He started work with the old International News Service, then was a marine combat correspondent in Korea. From 1955 to 1961, he covered the United Nations for CBS. That network sent him to Moscow to cover the trial of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers in 1960, and he was booked into the same hotel as Mrs. Powers, which gave him entree other reporters did not have.

The following year, he went to Moscow for ABC, and stayed till 1965. He was thrown out by the Russians after ABC broadcast a report that another Kremlin shakeup was imminent. Assigned to Vietnam, he won an Overseas Press Club award for his coverage.

But like the rest of his work, his performance in Vietnam stirred controversy. Some of his ex-colleagues spoke at his funeral, and praised him. Some who did not attend are

much less generous. They call him "flake" and worse. They say his work was unsatisfactory, and that is why he was fired. Sam asserted that he was let go because of CIA pressure after a Soviet defector falsely identified him as a one-time agent.

After that he worked here and there, but never held a big-league journalistic job again. He devoted most of his time to freedom-of-information suits and court efforts to clear his name.

In 1976, he told a congressional committee that while he was with CBS he had reported to the FBI on Soviet delegates at the U.N. He denied taking any money from the FBI, and said he never worked for the CIA or any foreign agency. But it was much harder to get the government to say so.

He demanded to know the specifics of whatever the government had against him. None of those specifics ever came out. But eventually the CIA did give him the letter saying it had no case against him.

And then U.S. District Judge Barrington D. Parker issued an opinion saying the FBI had no grounds to question his patriotism, that all the derogatory material against him in the files either came from discredited sources or was gossip or innuendo.

That is where it stood when he died of lung cancer last week.

A series of his friends delivered eulogies at the Fort Myer chapel, across the river in

Arlington. One recalled that "he witnessed many of mankind's woes, and was beset by more than a few of them himself." As a reporter, he said, Sam "regarded gunfire as a minor impediment to getting the facts."

They remembered his outgoing style, his cavorting in a native dance at Moscow's Uzbekistan restaurant, his historic bachelor's party at the Aragvi restaurant there. One said that at times, his journalistic eagerness made him his own worst enemy. His son said that "if he couldn't get in the front door, he'd go in the back."

And either directly or obliquely, every speaker referred to the web that had enmeshed Sam. An old sidekick said he "battled dragons" few of us ever encounter. His son said "I can tell you personally my father was no spy, because he couldn't keep a secret more than 15 or 20 minutes."

Ted Koppel, an ABC colleague, said "there was no ambiguity about the essence of this man. . . . There aren't many of us who have had our loyalty certified by the CIA and our patriotism by a federal judge."

What a waste it was that Sam had to spend his last years defending his name, he went on — and what a shame that so many of his erstwhile friends did not speak out on his behalf. Sam's family can be proud now, he said — but "I'm not so sure about the rest of us."

Neither am I. It was hard to be sure of anything about Sam.

U.S.A.



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